

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A heat fusible conjugate fiber produced by high-speed melt spinning, and after the spinning, a crimp treatment but no drawing, which comprises:

a first resin component having an orientation index of 40% or higher; and

a second resin component having a lower melting or softening point than the melting point of the first resin component and an orientation index of ~~[[25%]]~~ 16% or lower, the second resin component being present on at least part of the surface of the fiber in a lengthwise continuous configuration,

wherein said fiber has negative heat shrinkage values at a temperature higher than the melting point or softening point of the second resin component by 10°C, and increases in length upon heating, and

wherein the heat fusible conjugate fibers are staple fibers of 30 to 70 mm in length.

2-3. (Cancelled)

4. (Previously Presented) The heat fusible conjugate fiber according to claim 1, having a sheath-core configuration in which the first resin component makes the core, and the second resin component makes the sheath.

5. (Previously Presented) The heat fusible conjugate fiber according to claim 1, wherein the first resin component comprises polypropylene, and the second resin component comprises high-density polyethylene.

6. (Original) A nonwoven fabric produced by providing a carded web comprising the heat fusible conjugate fiber according to claim 1 and heat fusing the intersections of the fibers constituting the web.

7. (**Currently Amended**) A bulky nonwoven fabric comprising heat fusible conjugate fibers comprising two components having different melting points, formed by heating fusible conjugate fibers and heat fusing the intersections of the fibers,

wherein the bulky nonwoven fabric has a specific volume of $95 \text{ cm}^3/\text{g}$ or more, a strength per basis weight of $0.18 \text{ (N/25 mm)/(g/m}^2\text{)}$ or higher, and a bulk softness per unit thickness of 0.14 N/mm or less,

wherein the fusible conjugate fibers are produced by high-speed melt spinning, and after the spinning, a crimp treatment but no drawing, and comprise a first resin component having an orientation index of 40% or higher and a second resin component having a lower melting or softening point than the melting point of the first resin component and an orientation index of ~~[[25%]]~~ 16% or lower, the second resin component being present on at least part of the surface of the fiber in a lengthwise continuous configuration,

wherein said fibers have negative heat shrinkage values at a temperature higher than the melting point or softening point of the second resin component by 10°C , and increase in length upon heating, and

wherein the heat fusible conjugate fibers are staple fibers of 30 to 70 mm in length.

8. (Original) The bulky nonwoven fabric according to claim 7, which is produced by providing a carded web and heat fusing the intersections of the fibers in the web by blowing hot air.

9. (Cancelled)

10. (Previously Presented) The heat fusible conjugate fiber of claim 1, wherein the take-up speed during high-speed melt spinning is 2000m/min or higher.

11. (Previously Presented) The heat fusible conjugate fiber of claim 1, wherein, after the spinning, a crimp treatment but no heating or drawing is performed.

12. (New) The heat fusible conjugate fiber according to claim 1, wherein said fiber has a negative heat shrinkage value of at least -0.33% to -20% at a temperature higher than the melting point or softening point of the second resin component by 10°C, and increases in length upon heating.

13. (New) The bulky nonwoven fabric according to claim 7, wherein said fibers have a negative heat shrinkage value of at least -0.33% to -20% at a temperature higher than the melting point or softening point of the second resin component by 10°C, and increase in length upon heating.